



February 13, 2002

United States Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science and Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20510-6125

Re: Senate Bill S. 1214
The Port Maritime Security Act

Dear Chairman Ernest F. Hollings, Fellow Distinguished Senators and
Distinguished Guests:

It is with great pleasure that my community, North Charleston, South Carolina, accepts the invitation to provide comments concerning Senate Bill S. 1214 and other general issues surrounding seaport security.

The proposed legislation will provide much needed improvements for the security of the United States borders. Many of our concerns will be answered in the legislation. These include:

1. Security Features. Providing appropriate guidelines for fencing and surveillance will assist the adjacent communities.
2. Inspection of Cargo. Adding Customs Inspectors and agents will increase the inspection sequence of materials. With only 3% of containers being inspected, additional agents are essential.
3. On-Board Ship Personnel. We are pleased to see that the legislation addresses information and background requirements. Traditionally, once Customs clears the vessel, these individuals move about our community without restrictions and the legislation places some guidelines in this.
4. Security At Private Terminals. The South Carolina State Ports Authority maintains an active police force. Its ranks may have been reduced over time, but at least it is responsible for on-shore incidents. Some of the private terminals have inadequate or do not have any on-shore security and the legislation begins to address this point.

5. Background Checks Of On-Shore Personnel. It is encouraging to see background checks with restrictions for new or continuing employment. This piece of S. 1214 will aid the community in many other ways.
6. Coordination Among Various Agencies Dealing With Ports. We are pleased to witness a requirement for improved coordination. Customs, Coast Guard, United States Department of Agriculture and the local State Ports Authority Police provide services to the port and appropriate coordination can only strengthen our security. This is no place for turf wars on this issue.
7. Coordinated Access To The Waterfront. This will also assist in controlling security. Many individuals have direct access to the waterfront activities without any security checkpoints.
8. Manifest Of Cargo. We agree with the requirement to provide information on the products entering our communities. If an incident arises with cargo, the local authorities are usually called to assist. A few years ago, our municipality was called in to the local port to handle a chemical spill. This chemical agent became unstable with humidity and water. Our Police and Fire Departments were involved with this effort and our Fire Department maintained a command post in the site for three months. We would ask that some provisions be made to include notification of cargo, especially chemicals, and be made in advance to the local authorities. Even correct placards on the containers would be helpful. Chemical issues such as this could be organized by groups unfriendly to the United States.

This legislation is a great step forward for improving security at the ports in the United States. It will have some secondary effects. Our area has been designated as a "HIDA" Area (High Intensity Drug Area). Improved security at the Ports will assist with the war on drugs.

Another item for consideration is the efficiency of the ports versus security. Each port must buy into the improved security measures with enthusiasm. All of the ports in our country compete against each other for cargo. They must not allow the need for efficiency to take precedence over security.

Will we be able to have some influence in foreign ports to improve their security measures? Certainly we must take care of our ports first; however, improved security at all ports is critical.

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We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into this very important piece of our Homeland Security. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

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Mayor

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RKS/rbf